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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their news coverage February 13-22 on the island-wide celebrations of the Lunar New Year, on the upcoming legislative by-elections and the year-end five city and county magistrates' elections, and on a minor personnel reshuffle in the Cabinet. Several editorial pieces -- including a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," an op-ed in the pro-unification "United Daily News," an editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" -- all discussed U.S. President Barack Obama's recent meeting with the Dalai Lama and its impact on Sino-U.S. relations. A separate "Taipei Times" op-ed discussed U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and said "the US relationship with a democratic Taiwan is valuable in its own right and should not be subordinated to or become merely a function of US-China relations." End summary.

A) "Entr'acte by the White House"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (2/22):

"Regardless of China's firm opposition and strong protests, [U.S. President Barack] Obama had an over one hour closed-door meeting with the Dalai Lama. ... Had Obama decided not to meet with the Dalai Lama, his prestige would have suffered a heavy blow, both domestically and internationally. He was facing difficulties over which he had no control, and Beijing was clearly aware of that. The exchange of criticisms between the two sides was like an 'entr'acte' in the Beijing opera -- a short play that adds no actual value to the opera itself but has to be performed no matter what. ...

"Beijing believes that time is on its side, so it simply watches just how long and how far the Dalai Lama can travel around the globe. The chances are slim for the Tibet issue to be resolved during the lifetime of the Dalai Lama, yet his persistence and fortitude in pursuit of freedom and human rights have moved and inspired numerous souls. The Tibet issue will never come to a stop with the end of the Dalai Lama's life."

B) "With Two Rocks [Lying ahead], Will China and the United States Step out of the Doldrums?"

Chen Wei-hua, Director of International Affairs, Transparency International's Chapter in Taiwan, opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (2/21):

"... Despite the fact that Beijing and Washington have had clashes recently over trade protectionism, freedom of speech on the Internet, and [U.S.] arms sales to Taiwan, such rows are all within the scope that both nations are able to manage. The intimate trade relations between these two nations also make it impossible for both sides to suffer the pain of separating from each other. It is foreseeable that in the wake of [President Barack Obama's] meeting with the Dalai Lama, Sino-U.S. relations will face two challenges successively -- 'the appreciation of the Renminbi' and 'sanctions against Iran'. ... In addition, the United States is scheduled to hold an 'International Nuclear Safety Summit' in Washington D.C. in

April. Following the meeting with the Dalai Lama, the United States is sure to create an atmosphere of international cooperation. It remains to be seen whether Sino-U.S. relations will step out of the doldrums because of their need for each other."

C) "Beijing Needs to Turn down the Heat"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (2/22):

"... There is a certain pattern of events when it comes to relations with China that every US president has had to face. The first phase is characterized by working hard to create an amicable atmosphere. In the second phase, frictions appear as the US president addresses practical issues and this is where relations become more tense. The third phase is where the two sides accept their differences and find ways to work together, feeling out their counterpart's bottom line and gradually moving into the fourth, more pragmatic phase. Obama is already into the second year of his presidency and his inbox is piling up. Predictably, Sino-US relations are entering a testing phase. The sabers are already drawn, with recent tensions over economic issues, the Google hack attacks and US arms sales to Taiwan. Obama's decision to meet the Dalai Lama added fuel to the fire, giving the more hawkish elements in Beijing an excuse to push for a harder line against the US. This is likely to cause a cooling of relations that will take us into more unpredictable territory.  
...

"As China's power and influence in international matters grows it is going to have more opportunities to compete as well as cooperate with the US in international affairs and trade. As it does so, it is going to become more difficult to sweep any differences of opinion or conflicts of interest under the carpet. Both sides are going to

have to learn the benefits of cooperation and 'constructive conflict.' If China feels the need to turn up the heat, it risks not only damaging bilateral relations with the US, but also of reversing the current trend of regional integration and replacing it with a polarization of international relations that would do no good for China, the US or the international community. Both China and the US are currently facing a range of domestic challenges and in future they are going to have to address a number of issues together, such as stabilizing the global economy, dealing with climate change and preventing weapons proliferation. These issues are going to require cooperation and China would do well to recognize the differences it has with other countries and make an effort to tone down its confrontational behavior."

D) "Justifying US Arms Sales to Taiwan"

Parris Chang, a professor emeritus of political science at Pennsylvania State University and former deputy secretary-general of Taiwan's National Security Council, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (2/22):

"... Obama should be praised and congratulated for standing firm and making the right, courageous decision on arms sales and the meeting with the Dalai Lama, not allowing Chinese leaders to use threats to adversely affect US policy and the national interest. Taiwan-US-China relations have made great progress in 30 years. Wise and balanced US arms sales to Taiwan have contributed to the peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the Asia-Pacific region, and have made the incipient Taiwan-China detente possible. On the other hand, however, China continues to build up its offensive military capabilities along the Taiwan Strait and Taiwan's military capabilities have fallen further behind those of the PRC, hence it is imperative that Obama should resist China's pressure and, as soon as possible, make available to Taiwan the advanced F-16C/D fighters that it needs to deter military coercion and defend itself.

"There is no reason for Washington to believe that Taiwan's unification with China is desirable or inevitable. The three Sino-US Communiqués do not commit the US to Taiwan's unification with China -- and democratic changes in Taiwan have precluded it. The US relationship with a democratic Taiwan is valuable in its own right and should not be subordinated to or become merely a function of US-China relations."

